

HARTFORD FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
IAFF LOCAL 760, AFL-CIO-CLC
555 FRANKLIN AVENUE, HARTFORD, CT 06114-3019



March 10, 2011

Dear Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is Vincent Fusco and I am here today to speak against Raised Bill No. 989. I am President of the Hartford Fire Fighters Association and the Legislative Chair of the Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut. The changes to the Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA) proposed in this bill would have an adverse effect on all Municipal Employees in the state, including the approximately 5000 Professional Fire Fighters. The current system established in MERA has proven to be effective and fair to both the Municipalities and the Employees.

MERA currently requires that the arbitration panel include the Municipal Employer's financial capability to pay when deciding issues. The arbitration panel is obligated to weight the actual financial status of the Municipality. Over the years, Municipalities have attempted to disguise their current financial ability by overfunding line items and using other accounting tricks. The proposed changes in this bill will eliminate the mechanism to ensure that a fair and honest accounting is conducted. This will make it impossible for Municipal employees to participate in an equitable and productive bargaining process.

The proposed changes to limit the review of a rejected arbitrated award by a municipality to a single arbitrator would further erode the Municipal Employees access to a fair process. Currently only Municipalities have the ability to reject an arbitrated award. Both sides invest money and time in the arbitration process. It is an expensive and time consuming process. This ensures that it is used only in extreme cases. The use of three arbitrators provides for both positions to receive equal footing and adequate arguments. The reduction to a single Arbitrator for any future rejected awards would only further strip the Employees right to a fair process.

The current process outlined in MERA provides for a fair and equitable process. The changes proposed in this bill only will only diminish the underling intent of MERA. On behalf of the Professional Fire Fighters of Connecticut, I urge the rejection of this and any other attacks on MERA. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Vincent Fusco', written over a horizontal line.

Vincent Fusco
President